

The voice of the pulpit must ring clear and loud; the power of the school must be deep and firm, in the exposure of error, in the denunciation of vice, in the maintenance of truth, in the enforcement of virtue, and in the stimulus to every good work. It is sometimes said that the pulpit is offate, that sermons are insipid, that the schools are dead, that the Church has lost its power. There is perhaps too much reason for the complaint. We had better not disguise the fact that we have degenerated in much of our public teaching, and in much of our public worship. There is not life enough in our services; there is not power enough in our word. These are not the days for learned dulness, for respectable formality, for dry essays, for abstract dissertations, for freezing devotion, for insipid sentimentality. We want sermons bristling with thought; we want services instinct with life. All the resources of genius, all the treasures of learning, all the charms of oratory, all the fascinations of art, may come to our aid. But as supplemental to these, we must have the fire of plety, and the inspiration of the Spirit, by which in living forms, and in overwhelming power, the truth may be brought into direct contact with the mind and conscience of humanity, and through which, as in the days of Jesus, we may see the devils cast out, and the unbelieving and impenitent clothed, and sitting in their right mind.

As another unconscious step in the onward movement, Luther was despatched to Rome. The sphere of his observation was thereby enlarged. It was necessary he should become acquainted with the condition of the outer world, and still more with the general practices of the Church. He had hitherto moved within a narrow sphere. All his sympathies entwined around the Church. So far he had no reason to suspect it of imposture and fraud. His zeal indeed was such, that according to his own confession, he was willing to kindle with his own hands the fire which might consume Erasmus, or any other heretic who should call in question the supremacy of the Pope. Yet the reformation to be produced was a reformation of abuses without, no less than of doctrines within. There was a corrupt faith to begin with, and that by a natural process would produce a corrupt life. By devout study, Luther had gained a correct knowledge of the theory of salvation; by careful observation, he was now to apprehend the revolting errors of the Church.

The mission on which Luther was despatched to Rome was ostensibly to adjust certain differences which had sprung up between the Vicar-General and some of the Convents of his Order; it supplied indirectly the means for the exposure of the whole system. Luther started upon his journey with the brightest anticipations. Who had not heard of the glory of the Eternal City?—of the sanctity of the Vicar of Christ?—of the devotion of the Convents and Churches, which like so many fountains sent forth the streams of life?—and who could be surrounded with these, live among them, gaze upon them, feel their presence, inhale their influence, without a corresponding refinement of taste and elevation of feeling? Such was Luther's expectation, as it had been the dream of multitudes before him. He was doomed to a bitter disappointment. The contrast between what he expected and what he realized, was greater than words could express. Along the entire route from Germany to Rome he found cause for surprise and shame. Many of the Convents were the abodes of luxury and sensuality. There was unblushing profanity; there was unmitigated idleness.